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Senate Agrees, Boating Hit-and-Run a Felony

Punishment now same as vehicular hit-and-run

LANSING – Members of the Michigan State Senate unanimously approved legislation Wednesday that would impose stricter sentencing guidelines for boaters involved in hit-and-run accidents.

Co-sponsored by Sen. Gerald VanWoerkom, R-Norton Shores, Senate Bills 658 and 659 change the penalties for the operator of a boat involved in a hit-and-run accident resulting in death or serious injury from a misdemeanor to a felony. This change makes the penalty for this crime the same as for those causing a hit-and-run accident in an automobile.

“It shouldn’t matter if a victim is hit by a boat or an automobile,” VanWoerkom said. “A hit-run-accident is a hit-and-run accident regardless of what the perpetrator is driving.”

Currently, the driver of a boat involved in such an accident is guilty of a misdemeanor and subject to a maximum sentence of 90 days. Under the proposed changes, someone guilty of failing to stop at the scene of a marine accident causing death would be guilty of a felony punishable by up to 15 years in prison and up to \$10,000 in fines. Someone guilty of failing to stop at the scene of a marine accident causing serious impairment would be guilty of a felony punishable by up to five years in prison and up to \$5,000 in fines.

“These bills will help correct the punishment disparity between these two crimes and help make Michigan waterways safer for all citizens,” VanWoerkom said.

Senate Bills 658 and 659 now go to the House of Representatives for consideration.